

S E R M O N

PREACH'D IN THE

Parish-Church of *Eltham* in *KENT*,

O N

Friday, FEBRUARY 6, 1756.

B E I N G

The Day appointed by Authority for a GENERAL FAST.

By PETER PINNELL, M. A.Vicar of the said Parish, and Rector of *Bermondsey* in *Surry*.

Published at the Request of the PARISHIONERS.

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M,DCC,LVI.



Sir JOHN SHAW, Bart.

Of ELTHAM in KENT.

S I R,

AS you are sensible that the following Discourse was not designed for the Press, I shall not here apologize for the Inaccuracies of it: But (notwithstanding the favourable Reception it met with from the Pulpit) you will find by a serious Perusal that I was reduced to this Dilemma, either to hazard the critical Censure of the World, or disregard the unanimous Request of my Parishioners: The Publication however shews that I would choose rather to have my *Prudence* than my *Duty* suspected.

The solemn Occasion of the late Fast should induce every Man to “commune with his own “Heart,” and the Observations which I have made, were such as naturally occurred in reflecting upon the Subject.—A general Reformation of Manners was my principal View; and as the Disposition of the Vulgar is to imitate

DEDICATION.

tate their Superiors, I urged the Necessity of Righteousness in *high Places*, as the most effectual Means of promoting that End. To go regularly into the Courts of the Lord's House, and discharge the public Offices of Religion, was the Plan of Conduct which I particularly recommended to the *Rich*, in order that the *lower People* "by seeing their good Works" might be influenced to "glorify their Father" "which is in Heaven." Such was the *Rule* I thought necessary to prescribe; and I know not a more proper *Example* to illustrate it than yourself.—All, I am persuaded, must *approve the one*, and happy for Religion, would they *imitate the other*! I am,

S I R,

Your most obliged,

and humble Servant,

Eltham, Feb. 28,

1756.

PETER PINNEL.

Mat. XXIII. 37, 38.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! *How often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not—Behold your House is left unto you desolate!*

WHOEVER reads the sacred Scripture with Attention, will find the Severity and Goodness of the Lord to be often united in the same Object; and that his Mercy is most eminently displayed at the very Time when he thinketh upon Vengeance: He never makes bare his Arm without Reluctance, nor pours out the Vials of his *Wrath*, till *Grace* and *Favour* have been rejected.—Thus our blessed Saviour, foreseeing the inevitable Destruction which would overwhelm *Jerusalem*, represented his Affection by the lively Metaphor of a Hen gathering her Chickens under her Wings; and while he wept over the City, he burst out into this pathological Lamentation. “ O *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen ga-
 B “ thereth

“ thereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye
 “ would not!—behold your House is left unto you de-
 “ solate!”——

From the former Part of these Words, I shall consider how unwilling the Almighty is to bring Destruction upon a Nation. “ O *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, how often
 “ would I have gathered thy Children together, even as
 “ a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and
 “ ye would not!”

From the latter Part I shall shew that Wickedness will prove the Ruin of any People——“ Behold your
 “ House is left unto you desolate!”

First then, I am to shew that the Almighty is unwilling to bring Destruction upon a Nation.

It is the Method of God's Providence, in his Dealings with the Children of Men, to try all possible Means of Repentance, and gradually awaken Sinners to their Duty; but if the gentle Methods of Cultivation will not improve his Vineyard, then nothing but Punishment and Amputation can be expected; and to resist the Power of a *mild Correction* is certainly an Invitation to more *sharp Inflictions*. God is ready to “ have Mercy upon
 “ us miserable Sinners,” upon the humble Confession of our Fault, and Resolution to offend no more; and such are his Bowels of Compassion, that he never perceives in us the least Inclination to return to Duty, but his Heart is dissolved into Love, and his Arms are open to receive us!—Thus tenderly does he express his Con-
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cern for the Children of *Israel*, when they *began to repent*, “ is *Ephraim* my dear Son? Is he a pleasant Child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly “ remember him still, therefore my Bowels are troubled “ for him, I will surely have Mercy upon him, saith “ the Lord?”—With Respect to the *Ninevites*, “ God “ saw their Works that they turned from their evil “ Ways, and God repented of the Evil that he had “ said he would do unto them, and he did it not!” And in various other Places of sacred Scripture we may perceive how mild are the Proceedings of divine Justice against a sinful People: The Almighty takes a long Time to make ready his Bow, and to prepare the Instruments of Vengeance, before he “ executeth Sentence:”—Frequently he threatens, and frequently lifts up his Arm, before he gives the fatal Blow! And to what End should he so long forbear to strike, but that a Nation thereby may be brought to Repentance, and by Repentance may prevent the Execution of his Wrath?—His Long-suffering waited in the Days of *Noah* for the Space of an Hundred and twenty Years:—and still as a farther Instance of his Patience:—*An Instance* that must speak *Divinity*! He thus expresses himself with regard to *Jerusalem*, “ run you to and fro “ thro’ the Streets of *Jerusalem*, and see now and know, “ and seek in the broad Places thereof, if you can find a “ Man, if there be any that executeth Judgment, and “ seeketh the Truth, and I will pardon it!”—This sure is Mercy that cannot be less than *infinite*!—Here the Almighty plainly shews how desirous he was to gather them under his Wings, even as a Hen gathereth her

Chickens ; but they would not!—The Consequence of which was, that “ their House was left unto them desolate.”

With a due Sense therefore of our manifold Transgressions, let us reflect upon this Passage ; and let the Reflection lead us to Repentance : and then we may hope thro’ God’s Grace that “ *our House* will not be left “ unto us desolate ! ”—For the Lord is not implacable even to the most abandoned ; he remembers that we are but Dust, and considers the Fallibility of human Nature : Whenever he finds us ready to *repent* he is merciful to *forgive*, and sends down his holy Spirit to direct us in the Performance of our Duty ; and at the last if we render ourselves Objects of his Compassion, then will he gather us under the Wings of his Providence ! then will he rejoice to spare the Rod, for “ his Nature and “ Property is ever to have Mercy and to forgive.”—

Thus having considered how unwilling the Lord is to bring Ruin upon a Nation, I proceed now to shew that Wickedness will prove the Destruction of any People. “ Behold your House is left unto you desolate.”

If we build our Hopes of national Felicity upon any other Basis, but that of Religion and Virtue, we shall surely be disappointed ; for “ the Nation and Kingdom “ that will not serve the Lord shall perish.” (*Isaiab LX. 12.*) a Maxim this, not drawn from the Theory of a political Enthusiast, or the Conjectures of a speculative Philosopher, but formed upon Reason and Experience, and

and declared by the holy Spirit of God ; who “ turn-
 “ eth a fruitful Land into Barrenness for the Wickedness
 “ of them that dwell therein.”—And if we want In-
 stances to convince us of this important Truth, we may
 be abundantly supplied both from sacred and profane
 History :—As to particular Cities, where are *Sodom* and
Gomorrhah, *Admah* and *Zeboim* ?—The Places indeed
 where once these Cities stood may now be found, but
 those Places serve as a dreadful Monument of the want
 of *Ten righteous Men* within their Walls !—Would we
 enquire the Fate of the great Monarchies of *Assyria*,
Babylon, and *Egypt* ? They were according to the Pro-
 phecies destroyed for their Corruption, and are a stand-
 ing Lesson of Instruction to all Nations, who have “ Eyes
 “ to see, and Hearts to understand.”

Thus likewise, the frequent Interpositions of divine
 Providence with regard to the People of *Israel*, were
 always suitable to the Manner of their Conversation ;
 and they never failed to enjoy Prosperity, or to be visited
 with Affliction, according as Piety and Virtue flourished
 or declined.—And as to the *Romans*, whilst Temperance,
 Fortitude, and Integrity, with every other heroic and
 social Perfection prevailed among them, so long were
 they the Glory of all the Earth, and blessed with a Se-
 ries of providential Success : But when Luxury and
 Licentiousness introduced a numerous Train of Evils,
 and destroyed every public and private Virtue ; then was
 their Strength gradually enfeebled, their Reputation
 miserably blasted, and all their Glory “ scattered as a
 “ Morning Cloud.”—This is a true Picture of the *Roman*
 Empire

Empire before its Overthrow ; and I wish that we ourselves could not furnish a Copy much resembling the Original.—It is a disagreeable Task to enumerate the Iniquities of a People ; but it is however at some Seasons extremely necessary ; and at such as the present ought not to be waved : It would be an impious Absurdity on a *Day of Humiliation* to draw a Veil over our Crimes ; and no *Charity* could be now so unseasonable and misapplied, as that which would “ cover the Multitude of our Sins : ” May the fatal Consequence therefore of *Roman* Luxury (by the Grace of God) open our Eyes, and make us properly “ commune with our own Hearts ; ” for otherwise we may expect that the Degeneracy of our Times may prove the Presage of future Misery, and Children yet unborn may rue the Wickedness which now prevails !—For it is a Truth too evident to be denied, and too dismal to be unaffecting, that we daily lift up our Hands against Heaven ; and employ every Faculty of the Soul and every Power of the Body, in Opposition to all Principles of Reason, and in Disobedience to the Will of God. Is not the Power of *natural* Religion impaired with that of *revealed*, and does not the Cause of *moral* Virtue sink with both ?—Is not a Spirit of Profaneness and Infidelity gone forth to trouble, to dishonour, to corrupt our Land ; and every Work of Darkness committed in open Day without the Fear of divine Vengeance, or of human Laws ? Are not the *Commandments* of the Lord openly violated, and the *Ordinances* of the Christian Religion as generally neglected ? Is not the Duty of public and private Prayer made the Subject of Ridicule ; and does it not prevail

prevail as a Fashion to throw off even the *Appearance* of Godliness, and to look upon it as a Mark of Weakness or of Superstition?—Thus do we foolishly forsake the Lord our God to “go after our own Inventions,” eager in the Pursuit of dissolute Pleasures, and gratifying every sensual Appetite at the Expence of every virtuous Principle.—And “shall not the Lord visit for these “Things? Shall not his Soul be avenged of such a Nation as this?” It has before been observed, that the Rise and Fall of Kingdoms have always kept Pace with the Prevalency of Virtue and Vice among them; and how therefore can we expect (without Repentance) any Thing less than some *severe Correction*, which may possibly be the Means of a Reformation, and thereby prevent our *Ruin*? For a melancholy Reflection it is to make (but not more *melancholy* than it ought to be *alarming*) that if we will not be reclaimed by the Almighty’s *correcting* Rod, his *vindictive* Scourge will inevitably destroy us.—And tho’ he may not yet suffer his *whole* Displeasure to arise, tho’ he may still mercifully suspend the full Execution of his Anger; yet unless we make Haste to “wash our Hearts from Wickedness,” and return to the Lord by a sincere Repentance, he may rise suddenly as in the Night, and “in our Security “we may be destroyed.”—Warnings from the Almighty we have had sufficient: He has long since displayed the Ensigns of Judgment in our Sight, and alarmed us with various Tokens of his Displeasure; punishing, as it were, “by little and little, and giving us Place “for Repentance that we might amend.” He has visited our Offences by the Pestilence which has long raged among
among

among the Cattle ; and he has lately spoken to us in Anger from the very Bowels of the Earth and from the Depth of the Sea !—And what can it be attributed to but the Mercy of Heaven that we did not share the Fate of *Dathan* and *Abiram* ? that we were not involved in that Calamity which has overwhelmed the Capital City of a Kingdom, attached to us both in a political and commercial View !—It was of divine Goodness that our House became not desolate ! “ This was the “ Lord’s doing,” and is no less “ marvellous in our “ Eyes,” than it ought to be instructive to our Hearts. Let us therefore examine ourselves whether we have made a proper Use of these Judgments ; and consider what Acknowledgments we have shewed for the loving Kindness of the Lord :—Have we more Temperance, Charity, and Devotion, than we had before ? Have we brought forth Fruits meet for Repentance, and resolved to be “ Lovers of Pleasure *less* than Lovers of God ?” Have we purged out the old Leaven of Malice and Hypocrisy, of Infidelity and Libertinism, which naturally “ kindle God’s Wrath and Indignation against us ?”—In short, what Improvement have we made in Virtue, and what Ground have we gain’d upon Vice ? What Conquest have we made upon our *Flesh*, and what new Strength have we added to our *Spirit* ? How far have we weaned “ our Affections from the Things below,” and how far advanced them towards Heaven ?—These are the Subjects which should employ our Thoughts ; whereby we shall be acquainted with the true State of our Souls, and know upon what Terms of Favour we stand with the Almighty. And if our Conscience accuse

cuse us in these important Points, let us immediately "awake to Righteousness," and "seek after the Things which make for our Peace:" For be we assured, that "He whose Name alone is *Jehovah*, is the most "High over all the Earth!"—Be we assured that the same righteous Judge, by whose Authority Destruction was brought upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*: by whose Authority the Earth opened her Mouth and swallowed up the Company of *Korab*—the same righteous Judge still ruleth over the Kingdoms of the World: and "tho' "Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily," yet *Justice* is an Attribute of God as well as *Mercy*; and if neither the Memory of his Corrections, nor the Experience of his Goodness can work in us a Reformation, he will certainly resume the Rod; and "except we repent we shall all likewise perish."—Whereas if we have a true Sense of our manifold Sins, and stedfastly purpose to lead a new Life; *He* that would have spared *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* for the Sake of *ten righteous Persons*, and *Jerusalem* for the Sake of *one just Man*, may be graciously pleased to avert those Judgments that we most righteously have deserved!

That our Name therefore may never be mentioned as an Instance of divine Vengeance, let us turn from the Evil of our Ways, and "walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called," doing our Duty towards God and towards our Neighbour.—Let our Duty towards *God* be manifested by a laudable Zeal in Support of the Christian Faith, by acquiescing under every Dispensation of Providence, and "running with Patience the

" Race that is set before us."—Let us perform our Duty towards our *Neighbour*, by " doing to others as we would " they should do unto us:" Let no selfish Principle, like an Eddy, draw in our whole Concern; nor any *private* Interest make us dispense with *public* Good. Let all of us (especially those in superior Stations of Life) testify a Solicitude for the Welfare of our *Jerusalem*, by setting a Pattern of true Holiness; of Zeal without Uncharitableness, and of Religion without Hypocrisy: Let our personal Virtues watch like Guardian Angels over the Peace of the Community; and be " a " Light to lighten the " People; who seeing " our good " Works may glorify our Father which is in Heaven." Let us " walk in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameless", by a constant and regular Attendance upon the Service of the Church, and " not forsake the assembling ourselves together, as the " Manner of some is." * In a Word, let us apply to our Families, to our Neighbours, and to the whole Circle of our Acquaintance, the Light of our Example, the Weight of our Authority, and the Influence of our Conversation.—By such Means, those who are in *high Life* will employ the Advantage of their Situation to establish the Credit of Religion; for what can more effectually prevail upon the Vulgar to " follow after Righteousness," than to see it made the Pursuit of those, whom they suppose to have most Judgment to discern its Value? To whom should they apply for a Rule to direct their Steps, but " to the great Men of the City, " as unto those that have known the Way of the Lord, " and the Judgment of their God?"—Thus shall we soon

soon perceive the Fruits of public Happiness spring forth from our pious manner of Conversation: Our Dependants will be glad to imitate our Conduct in order to secure our Esteem: Our Friends and Neighbours will insensibly catch the heavenly Flame; the "Beauty of Holiness" will be universally admired; "Truth" will flourish out of the Earth," and "God, even our own God, will give us his Blessing."—From hence it appears, that upon *the Rich* chiefly depends the Reformation of public Manners, and of Consequence the Prosperity of this our *Jerusalem*:—it is reasonable therefore to conclude that God has distinguished some of you from the lower Degrees of Mankind, that you might advance his Glory by an exemplary Life, "training up others in the Way they should go," and improving the Talents committed to your Charge.—The Blessings which you enjoy are designed as a Tryal and Opportunity for you to perform good Works: They are the *Means* of your *Influence* upon others; and your *Influence* upon others is your *Power* of doing Good; and your *Power* of doing Good is certainly your *Obligation* to do it; for it is the concurrent Voice of Reason and Revelation, that "to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required."—Such are the Duties incumbent upon those who are raised above the Vulgar; and as to Persons of a *lower Class*, let them guard against the Contagion of ill Examples in high Places, and never follow their superiors to do Evil; let them "cultivate the Fruits of Holiness," Temperance and Justice; and tho' the *Body* be clothed in *Rags*, still let their

Soul be adorned with “ the Robes of Righteousness.” for there is no Station so low, but it becomes honourable, when graced by good Works ; and Poverty itself, if joined with Virtue is sure to be respected.—

+ In short, every Individual has it in his Power to be serviceable in his Generation ; he should therefore first reform his own Life, abating thereby the Number of Sinners at least by *one*, and lessening the Burthen of public Guilt ; and then should excite others to their Duty, by a resolute Application of private Reproof, by a laudable Indignation against every Offender, and an earnest Zeal in the Execution of our Laws.—This would check the daring Insolence of Libertines, and “ restrain the “ overflowings of Ungodliness which make us afraid”. —And indeed at this Time we have more than a common Call to such necessary Works of Religion ; for God has spoken to us in his own Voice ; that Voice, which “ maketh the Mountains skip,” and at which “ the Earth melteth away :” and if we do not properly listen to such a Call, “ good were it for us if we had “ never been born !” If neither the *Judgments* nor the *Mercies* of God can work in us a Reformation “ we are of all Men the most miserable !” Under such Circumstances in vain has the Wisdom of the Legislature “ proclaimed a Fast, and called a solemn Assembly ;” for if it only proves the transitory Consequence of our past Fears, and not the Beginning of a future Reformation, the Fast which we have chosen is an Abomination to the Lord. The true Merit of the Duty of Repentance consists, not merely in the Performance

formance of it, but in performing it with a stedfast Purpose of Amendment: It is not the *outward* Form of Godliness but the *inward* Principle that must make our Humiliation acceptable to God; and the whole Success of a general Fast depends upon the Manner, wherein it is observed by Individuals. Let us therefore discharge the *substantial* Part of our Duty with as much Care as we have performed the *ceremonial*; and not imagine that our Humiliation is to cease with the public Service, or that our Work is finished when the Day is over.—By our future Conduct we should manifest the Sincerity of our Repentance; and by reflecting upon the melancholy Occasion of our “being gathered together in God’s Sight,” we should all resolve to “sin no more,” lest a similar Affliction “happen to us,” and “our House should be left desolate”.—If we imagine that our late suffering Brethren surpassed us in Wickedness, and thereby speak Peace to our own Souls, “we do but deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us:” It is unjustifiable upon every Principle of Reason and Religion thus “to flatter ourselves in our own Sight;” and the Gospel appointed for this Day has censured the Presumption of such a Sentiment; for “suppose ye “that these *Galileans* were Sinners above all *Galileans* because they suffered such Things? I tell you, “nay (says our blessed Saviour) but except ye repent, “ye shall all likewise perish!”—A Word this of serious Admonition to all Mankind, when any particular People is visited by the Hand of God; and no Person can attentively read it without a home-felt Application:

plication :—It teaches us to “ judge ourselves,” and checks every censorious Reflection upon the Calamities of our Fellow-creatures *abroad*; ~~Calamities~~ Calamities! in which many *at Home* by a necessary Connection have been involved! But whatever be the Distresses either of the one, or the other, still we should remember that “ it is the Lord’s doing;” “ the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord!” ~~This~~ This Consideration will teach us a proper Acquiescence in the Will of God; and a proper Acquiescence in his Will must naturally lead us to “ honour his holy Name;” and the joint Effect of both will be, that we shall “ serve him truly all the Days of our Life:” And then “ should the Earth be moved, and the Hills carried into the midst of the Sea; should the Waters thereof rage and swell, and the Mountains shake at the Tempest of the same,” still through the Spirit of divine Grace we should be “ prepared to meet our God.”—

May we therefore duly consider these Things before the Time is past; and fit ourselves for the Presence of our most holy Judge!—That Presence, before which we must one Day appear, attended with all the Pomp of Heaven, and all the Convulsions of an expiring World! And may we so behave ourselves in every Circumstance of Life, that we may have no Reason to dread the Approach of Death! For “ it is appointed for all Men once to die,” and should the Stroke come sudden upon us, as it did lately upon many of our Brethren; should the Tempest begin to
 roar,

roar, and the Earth instantly to open, how would our
 Souls be overwhelmed with Anguish and Confusion!
 How should we reflect upon the Burthen of our Sins,
 and wish for the Testimony of a good Conscience!
 How should we invoke the Mercy of Heaven, and
 call for the Pardon of our Redeeming God!—This
 Consideration must be terrible to wicked Men!—but
 the Reflection of a well-spent Life would change the
 Scene, and soften the Horror of such an awful Prospect;
 and be we assured, that what otherwise we may lament
 at the Hour of Death and the Day of Judgment, we
 now (if we please) have an Opportunity to prevent;
 and by a due Improvement of this Day's Fast, we may
 be “ wise to Salvation,” and happy for ever.—

F I N I S.

Trans. Lash. Feb. 16. 59. 1st

...and the Earth instantly to open, how would our
souls be overwhelmed with Anguish and Confusion!
How should we reflect upon the burden of our sins,
and wither in the Tribulation of a good Conscience!
How should we make the Mercy of Heaven, and
call for the Pardon of our Redeeming God!—This
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the Reflection of a well-spent Life would change the
Scene, and lessen the terror of such an awful Prospect;
and be we assured, that what otherwise we may lament
at the Host of Death and the Day of Judgment, we
now (if we please) have in our Power to prevent;
and by a due Improvement of this Day's Gift, we may
be "wise to Salvation," and "not to Sorrow."—

